IN THE SPECIFICATION

Please replace paragraph [0018] with the following amended paragraph:

[0018] Although the steering mechanism **14** shown in Figure 1 comprises a conventional steering column with a shaft **22**, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the steering mechanism **14** used in the assembly **10** need not be limited to one utilizing a traditional column structure. The steering mechanism **14** may, for example, comprise a steer-by-wire system which may or may not include a mechanical steering linkage such as the shaft [~~12~~] 22.

Please replace paragraphs [0020] – [0022] with the following amended paragraphs:

[0020] Although each of the guide rods **18** may have any suitable shape, each guide rod **18** shown in Figure 1 is preferably straight and comprises a steering tube having a front end **36** and a rear end **38**. Although any number of guide rods, or steering tubes, **18** may be utilized and arranged in any suitable configuration relative to the guide bracket **12**, the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** of the present invention preferably include four tubes spaced from one another in a quadrangle.

[0021] A front bracket **40** interconnects the front ends **36** of the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18**, and a rear bracket **42** supports the rear ends **38** of the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** and the steering mechanism **14**. The front and rear brackets **40** and **42** are spaced on opposite sides of the guide bracket **12**, such that the guide bracket **12** is located along the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** between the front and rear brackets **40** and **42**.

[0022] A second plurality of steering shear elements **34** interconnect the rear bracket **42** and the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18**. The steering shear elements **34** normally prevent movement of the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** relative to the rear bracket **42**, but shear in response to

application of the predetermined collapse force to the steering mechanism **14** for allowing the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** to move through the rear bracket **42** in the same manner as the shear elements associated with the guide bracket **12**. The rear ends **38** of the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** preferably extend through the rear bracket ~~40~~ 42.

Please replace paragraph [0026] with the following amended paragraph:

[0026] The guide bracket **12** includes an upper block **62** having bores **64** therethrough. The guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** extend through the bores **64**. The guide bracket **12** also includes a lower block **66** having bores **68** therethrough. The bolster tubes **54** extend through the bores **68** in the lower block **66**.

Please replace paragraphs [0027] - [0030] with the following amended paragraphs:

[0027] While any appropriate shearable device may be used, the steering shear elements **34** and bolster shear elements **56** of the present invention preferably comprise bushings. Each bushing is interposed between one of the rods [~~tubes~~] **18** or **54** and one of either the guide bracket **12** or the rear bracket **42** and has a detent or other feature which maintains the rod [~~tube~~] **18** or **54** in a fixed position relative to the guide bracket **12** or the rear bracket **42** during normal operation. Upon application of a sufficient collapse force to the steering mechanism **22** or knee bolster **52**, the detents or other features on the bushings maintaining the linkage between the guide bracket **12** or the rear bracket **42** and the respective rods [~~tubes~~] **18** or **54** will be broken, or "shear", which not only overcomes the holding force on, but also releases the tubes 18 or ~~52~~ 54 for movement relative to the guide bracket **12** or rear bracket **42**.

[0028] The bolster tubes **54** of the assembly **10** are disposed in at least one pair on either side of the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18**. The bolster tubes **54** are also disposed parallel to the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18**. Two pairs of bolster tubes **54** are disclosed, and each pair extends through the bores **68** in the lower block **66**. The rear ends **60** of the bolster tubes **54** are supported by the rear bracket **42**. Disposing the bolster tubes **54** outside the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** permits the knee bolster **52** to collapse without interfering with or otherwise initiating a simultaneous or subsequent collapse of the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** and steering mechanism **14**.

[0029] As is best shown in Figures 4 and 5, the assembly **10** also includes an energy absorber system **70** for absorbing energy during movement of the steering mechanism **14** and knee bolster **52** relative to the guide bracket **12**. The energy absorber system **70** includes a first anvil-strap device **72** interconnecting the steering tubes **18** and upper block **62**. The first anvil-strap device **72** includes a release bracket **74** with bores **76** therethrough. As is shown in Figure 2 [~~1~~], the release bracket **74** is disposed in engagement with the upper block **62**. The guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** extend through the bores **76** and are carried by the release bracket **74** in fixed relation to one another. The at least one and preferably two pair of plastically-deformable straps **78** with holes **80** therethrough are disposed in frictional and bending engagement with respective pairs of first and second anvils **82** and **84**. The straps **78** interconnect the release bracket **74** with the upper block **62**. Each pair of straps **78** includes a high-force strap **86** and a low-force strap **88** extending in parallel relation to one another from the release bracket **74**. Retaining pins **90** are disposed within the release bracket **74**. Each pin **90** extends through one of the holes **80** and interconnects the associated strap **86** or **88** with the release bracket **74**. The pins **90** may

alternatively be disposed within the upper block **62** for securing the straps **86** and **88** with the upper block **62**.

[0030] The first anvil-strap device **72** is a variable energy absorbing system that utilizes pairs of S-straps, i.e., straps deformed in the shape of the letter "S", having variable widths. However, one skilled in the art will appreciate that other energy absorbing devices may be used, including but not limited to those which employ one or more M-straps, J-straps, , i.e., deformed in the shape of the letters "M" or "J", other straps, wires, pyrotechnic or other actuating devices, or a combination thereof.

Please replace paragraph [0032] with the following amended paragraph:

[0032] Although any suitable actuating device may be utilized, the preferred actuating device **100** comprises an electrically activated pyrotechnic device. A control system such as that which is schematically depicted at **104** in Figure 4 is operatively connected to the devices **100**. The control system **104** monitors and detects variable components affected by the crash condition, determines the amount of energy to be absorbed, and transmits a signal corresponding to that amount to the actuating devices **100**, which in turn actuates one or more of the devices **100** to modify the energy absorbing characteristics in accordance with the requirements of a particular crash event. For example, during a crash condition in which a large predetermined collapse force is applied to the assembly **10**, none of the actuating devices **100** would be discharged in order to maximize the energy absorbing forces between the pairs of straps **86** and **88** and respective anvils **82** and **84**. Under less severe, moderate conditions, the actuating devices **100** may initiate release of the low-force straps **88** to provide corresponding reduced energy absorbing characteristics of the system **104**. Under still lesser crash conditions, the actuating

devices **100** may respond to by initiating release of the high-force straps **86** to produce a correspondingly reduced energy absorbing characteristic of the system **104**.

Please replace paragraph [0035] with the following amended paragraph:

[0035] The assembly **10** also includes a pedal assembly, which is generally shown at **106** in Figure 7. The pedal assembly **106** is pivotally connected to the rear bracket **42** for pivotal movement in response to movement of the guide rods [~~steering tubes~~] **18** relative to the rear bracket **42**. The pedal assembly **106** includes a brake assembly **108** and a throttle assembly **110**. A mounting assembly **112** interconnects the brake and throttle assemblies **108** and **110** with the rear bracket **42**.

Please replace paragraph [0039] with the following amended paragraph:

[0039] Referring [~~again~~] to Figure [~~5~~] 8, the bifurcated bracket **132** includes a pair of screw bosses **162** through which screws extend (not shown) for securing the bracket **132** to the mounting assembly **112**. The pedal assembly **106** also includes a release mechanism **164**, which has a pair of pyrotechnic bosses **166** defining chambers **168**. A pyrotechnic pin **170** is disposed within the rear bracket **42** and communicates with at least one of the chambers **168**. As is shown in Figure 7, pyrotechnic devices **172** are disposed on the bosses **168**. Actuating the devices **172** causes the pyrotechnic pin **170** to fire, which in turn causes the bifurcated bracket **132** to pivot away from the rear bracket **42**.